IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

NATASHA LIGGINS

1246 N. 53rd Street

Philadelphia, PA 19131 : CIVIL ACTION

Plaintiff, : DOCKET NO.:

v.

PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT

CORPORATION 1500 Market Street

Philadelphia, PA 19102

Defendant.

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

CIVIL ACTION COMPLAINT

Natasha Liggins (*hereinafter* referred to as "Plaintiff," unless indicated otherwise), by and through her undersigned counsel, hereby avers as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This action has been initiated by Plaintiff against Public Health Management Corporation (*hereinafter* referred to as "Defendant") for violations of the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA" - 29 U.S.C. §§ 2601, *et. seq.*), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII" – 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000e, *et. seq.*), the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA"), and the Philadelphia Fair Practices Ordinance ("PFPO"). Plaintiff asserts, *inter alia*, that she experienced unlawful workplace discrimination and retaliation, culminating in her termination from Defendant. As a direct consequence of Defendant's unlawful actions, Plaintiff seeks damages as set forth herein.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. This Court has original subject matter jurisdiction over the instant action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§1331 and 1343(a)(4) because it arises under laws of the United States and seeks

redress for violations of civil rights violations under the ADA and the FMLA. There lies supplemental and/or ancillary jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state-law claims, as they arise out of the same common nucleus of operative fact(s) as Plaintiff's federal claims asserted herein.

- 3. This Court may properly maintain personal jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant's contacts with this state and this judicial district are sufficient for the exercise of jurisdiction in order to comply with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice, satisfying the standard set forth by the United States Supreme Court in <u>International Shoe Co. v. Washington</u>, 326 U.S. 310 (1945) and its progeny.
- 4. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391(b)(1) and (b)(2), venue is properly laid in this district because all of the acts and/or omissions giving rise to the claims set forth herein occurred in this judicial district.

PARTIES

- 5. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
 - 6. Plaintiff is an adult individual, with an address as set forth in the caption.
- 7. Public Health Management Corporation is a non-profit entity operating and headquartered in Eastern Pennsylvania. This entity employs at least 2,500 employees, operates nearly 350 programs, and provides a variety of educational and health-related services.
- 8. At all times relevant herein, Defendant acted by and through its agents, servants and/or employees, each of whom acted at all times relevant herein in the course and scope of their employment with and for Defendant.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

- 9. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 10. Plaintiff was hired by Defendant effective on or about October 2, 2017; and in total, Plaintiff was employed with Defendant for approximately 2 years. Plaintiff was employed for Defendant based at its headquarters (within Market Street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).
- 11. Plaintiff was at all relevant times while in the employ of Defendant working in the role of Parent-Child Home Program Site Coordinator.
- 12. From on or about June 26, 2019 through September 18, 2019, Plaintiff sought and was approved for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA"). Plaintiff had been pregnant, gave birth, and recovered medically during this timeframe (all of which is FMLA-qualifying).
- 13. Plaintiff was terminated by Defendant on September 30, 2019, which is 8 business days (or 12 calendar days) after returning from leave under the FMLA.
- 14. Defendant has defended post-termination and during administrative (pre-lawsuit) legal proceedings by claiming (and <u>admitting</u>): (1) *it decided* to terminate Plaintiff even *prior to her return* from (and during) FMLA (although her termination took place on September 30, 2019; and (2) Plaintiff's termination was due to budgetary reasons.
- 15. Plaintiff's last physical day of work and her effective termination took place on September 30, 2019. However, Plaintiff's termination was irrefutably discriminatory and retaliatory for, *inter alia*, the following reasons:
 - a. Defendant admits to making the decision to terminate Plaintiff while she was on FMLA and **during** her federally protected leave;

- b. Plaintiff's actual adverse action and termination on September 30, 2019 was **in exceedingly close temporal proximity** to her return from FMLA leave on Sept 18, 2019;
- c. Defendant's termination of Plaintiff for a reduction in force, job elimination, or budgetary reasons is pretextual as Plaintiff was the <u>only person</u> selected in her department for such an alleged reduction in force. Reductions in force <u>of a single person</u> who happens to be utilizing FMLA leave are highly unlikely, as such reductions (that are legitimate) *normally impact a substantial part of a workforce*;
- d. Plaintiff was 1 of nearly 5-7 site coordinators (in her department) at any given time who performed similar roles just handling different assigned geographic territories. Even if hypothetically, there was a true need for a reduction-inforce of a single person, Plaintiff was not the least senior or least tenured person or least qualified person performing her role. Defendant would have terminated someone less tenured in the role (if it were legitimate);
- e. Plaintiff had no warnings, discipline or other admonishment and to the contrary was a very good performer (receiving very good evaluations and accolades);
- f. Plaintiff applied for numerous alternative jobs upon termination notification, and she was denied or ignored as to any such opportunities (despite being better qualified than other applicants). And Defendant has a long history of finding alternative jobs or making up jobs for anyone who may be affected by a budgetary issue (when legitimate); and
- g. Nearly a year after Plaintiff was terminated, Defendant advertised as needing a site coordinator but when Plaintiff applied Defendant removed the posting and claimed it was no longer in need of another site coordinator.
- 16. Plaintiff was identified in evaluations during her employment as exceeding expectations, being a solid performer, and she was even given a positive reference following her termination by Defendant's management.
- 17. Despite the foregoing, Plaintiff was: (1) selectively and disparately chosen for termination; (2) not given an alternative job or role like others; (3) denied other open job opportunities; (4) not considered for a site coordinator role when it was suddenly (and

ostensibly) within Defendant's budget; and (5) in essence blackballed from working for Defendant.

18. The adverse actions taken against Plaintiff as outlined in this lawsuit were due to her pregnancy, her request for maternity leave, and use and/or exercise of FMLA. Defendant's termination selection of Plaintiff and discrimination / retaliation thereafter was so blatant as to constitute *willful* and intentional actions on its part.

First Cause of Action <u>Violations of the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA")</u> ([1] Interference; and [2] Retaliation)

- 19. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 20. Plaintiff was eligible for, qualified for, and approved for federally-protected FMLA leave.
- 21. Defendant has conceded to deciding to terminate Plaintiff **during** her FMLA leave although Plaintiff's effective termination took place 8 business days after her return from FMLA leave. Defendant's decision to terminate Plaintiff during Plaintiff's FMLA leave and to not permit realistic reinstatement to the same or similar position constitutes unlawful FMLA interference.
- 22. Plaintiff's termination on account of her using FMLA, exercising her FMLA rights, and for requesting FMLA leave - all constitutes unlawful retaliation under the FMLA.
- 23. Plaintiff was also not hired for numerous available roles, offered an alternative role, or hired for a subsequent site coordinator job position due to her prior FMLA needs, exercise of FMLA rights, and in retaliation for her asserting unlawful discrimination or retaliation complaints about and concerning Defendant.

24. Defendant's actions aforesaid constitute unlawful interference and retaliation in violation of the FMLA. Additionally, the facts, circumstances and implicit and explicit actions towards Plaintiff amply demonstrate willfulness and intent to violate the FMLA.

Second Cause of Action <u>Violations of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA")</u> ([1] Pregnancy Discrimination; and [2] Retaliation)

- 25. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 26. Plaintiff was terminated on account of her pregnancy, gender, and request for maternity leave.
- 27. Plaintiff was also not hired for numerous available roles, offered an alternative role, or hired for a subsequent site coordinator job position due to her prior maternity needs, pregnancy, and in retaliation for her asserting unlawful discrimination or retaliation complaints about and concerning Defendant.
- 28. These actions as aforesaid constitute violations of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA").

Third Cause of Action <u>Philadelphia Fair Practices Ordinance ("PFPO")</u> ([1] Pregnancy Discrimination; and [2] Retaliation)

- 29. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 30. Plaintiff was terminated on account of her pregnancy, gender, and request for maternity leave.
- 31. Plaintiff was also not hired for numerous available roles, offered an alternative role, or hired for a subsequent site coordinator job position due to her prior maternity needs,

pregnancy, and in retaliation for her asserting unlawful discrimination or retaliation complaints about and concerning Defendant.

32. These actions as aforesaid constitute violations of the Philadelphia Fair Practices Ordinance ("PFPO").

Fourth Cause of Action <u>Violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII")</u> ([1] Pregnancy Discrimination; and [2] Retaliation)

- 33. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 34. Plaintiff was terminated on account of her pregnancy, gender, and request for maternity leave.
- 35. Plaintiff was also not hired for numerous available roles, offered an alternative role, or hired for a subsequent site coordinator job position due to her prior maternity needs, pregnancy, and in retaliation for her asserting unlawful discrimination or retaliation complaints about and concerning Defendant.
 - 36. These actions as aforesaid constitute violations of Title VII.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that this Court enter an Order providing that:

- A. Defendant is to be prohibited from continuing to maintain its illegal policy, practice or custom of discriminating/retaliating against employees and are to be ordered to promulgate an effective policy against such unlawful acts and to adhere thereto;
- B. Defendant is to compensate Plaintiff, reimburse Plaintiff and make Plaintiff whole for any and all pay and benefits Plaintiff would have received had it not been for Defendant's illegal actions, including but not limited to past lost earnings, future lost earnings, salary, pay increases, bonuses, medical and other benefits, training, promotions, pension, and seniority.

Plaintiff should be accorded those benefits illegally withheld from the date she first suffered

retaliation/discrimination at the hands of Defendant until the date of verdict;

C. Plaintiff is to be awarded liquidated and/or punitive damages, as permitted by

applicable law(s) alleged asserted herein, in an amount believed by the Court or trier of fact to be

appropriate to punish Defendant for its willful, deliberate, malicious and outrageous conduct and

to deter Defendant or other employers from engaging in such misconduct in the future;

D. Plaintiff is to be accorded any and all other equitable and legal relief as the Court

deems just, proper and appropriate including for emotional distress;

E. Plaintiff is to be awarded the costs and expenses of this action and reasonable

legal fees as provided by applicable federal and state law;

F. Any verdict in favor of Plaintiff is to be molded by the Court to maximize the

financial recovery available to Plaintiff in light of the caps on certain damages set forth in

applicable federal law; and

G. Plaintiff's claims are to receive a trial by jury to the extent allowed by applicable

law. Plaintiff has also endorsed this demand on the caption of this Complaint in accordance with

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b).

Respectfully submitted,

KARPF, KARPF & CERUTTI, P.C.

By:

Ari R. Karpf, Esq. 3331 Street Road

Two Greenwood Square

Building 2, Ste. 128

Bensalem, PA 19020

(215) 639-0801

Dated: September 24, 2021

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

CASE MANAGEMENT TRACK DESIGNATION FORM

Telephone	FAX Number	E-Mail Address			
(215) 639-0801	(215) 639-4970	akarpf@karpf-law.com			
Date	Attorney-at-law	Attorney for			
9/28/2021 .	1	Plaintiff			
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Case 2:21-cv-04259-White Docaments Tricing 000/28/21 Page 10 of 11 For the Eastern district of Pennsylvania

DESIGNATION FORM(to be used by counsel or pro se plaintiff to indicate the category of the case for the purpose of assignment to the appropriate calendar)

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Address of Plaintiff: 1246 N. 53rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19131							
Address of Defendant: 1500 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 1							
Place of Accident, Incident or Transaction: Defendant's place of business							
RELATED CASE, IF ANY:							
Case Number: Judge:	Date Terminated:						
Civil cases are deemed related when Yes is answered to any of the following questions:							
1. Is this case related to property included in an earlier numbered suit pending or within one year yes No X previously terminated action in this court?							
2. Does this case involve the same issue of fact or grow out of the same transaction as a prior suit Yes No X pending or within one year previously terminated action in this court?							
3. Does this case involve the validity or infringement of a patent alre numbered case pending or within one year previously terminated a							
4. Is this case a second or successive habeas corpus, social security appeal, or pro se civil rights Yes No X							
I certify that, to my knowledge, the within case this court except as noted above.							
DATE: 9/28/2021 ARK2484 / 91538							
Attorney-at-Law / Pro Se Plaintiff Attorney I.D. # (if applicable)							
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Case 2:21-cv-04259-WB Document 1 Filed 09/28/21 Page 11 of 11 VIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as

provided by local rules of court. purpose of initiating the civil do	This form, approved by the ocket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCT	e Judicial Conference of TIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF	the United S THIS FORM.	tates in September 19 ^o	74, is required for the use of	the Clerk of Court for the		
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANTS				
LIGGINS, NATASHA (b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Philadelphia (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)			PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT CORPORATION County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF					
(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, A Karpf, Karpf & Cerutti, I Suite 128, Bensalem, PA		l, Two Greenwood			OF LAND INVOLVED.			
II. BASIS OF JURISDI	CTION (Place an "X" in O	ne Box Only)		ZENSHIP OF P	RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintif and One Box for Defendant)		
1 U.S. Government X 3 Federal Question Plaintiff (U.S. Government Not a Party)		PTF DEF Citizen of This State 1 1 Incorporated or Principal Place 4 4 of Business In This State						
2 U.S. Government Defendant			Citizen o	Citizen of Another State 2 2 Incorporated and Principal Place 5 5 of Business In Another State				
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